Three-Year Local School Districts/Charter Schools Technology Plan Template
(2007-2010)

HELP - Needs Assessment

A needs assessment is a systematic collection of information, focused on identifying barriers to student achievement.

The following information was originated in the Guide for Implementing Urban Education in Abbott Districts. It was modified to pertain to educational technology planning.
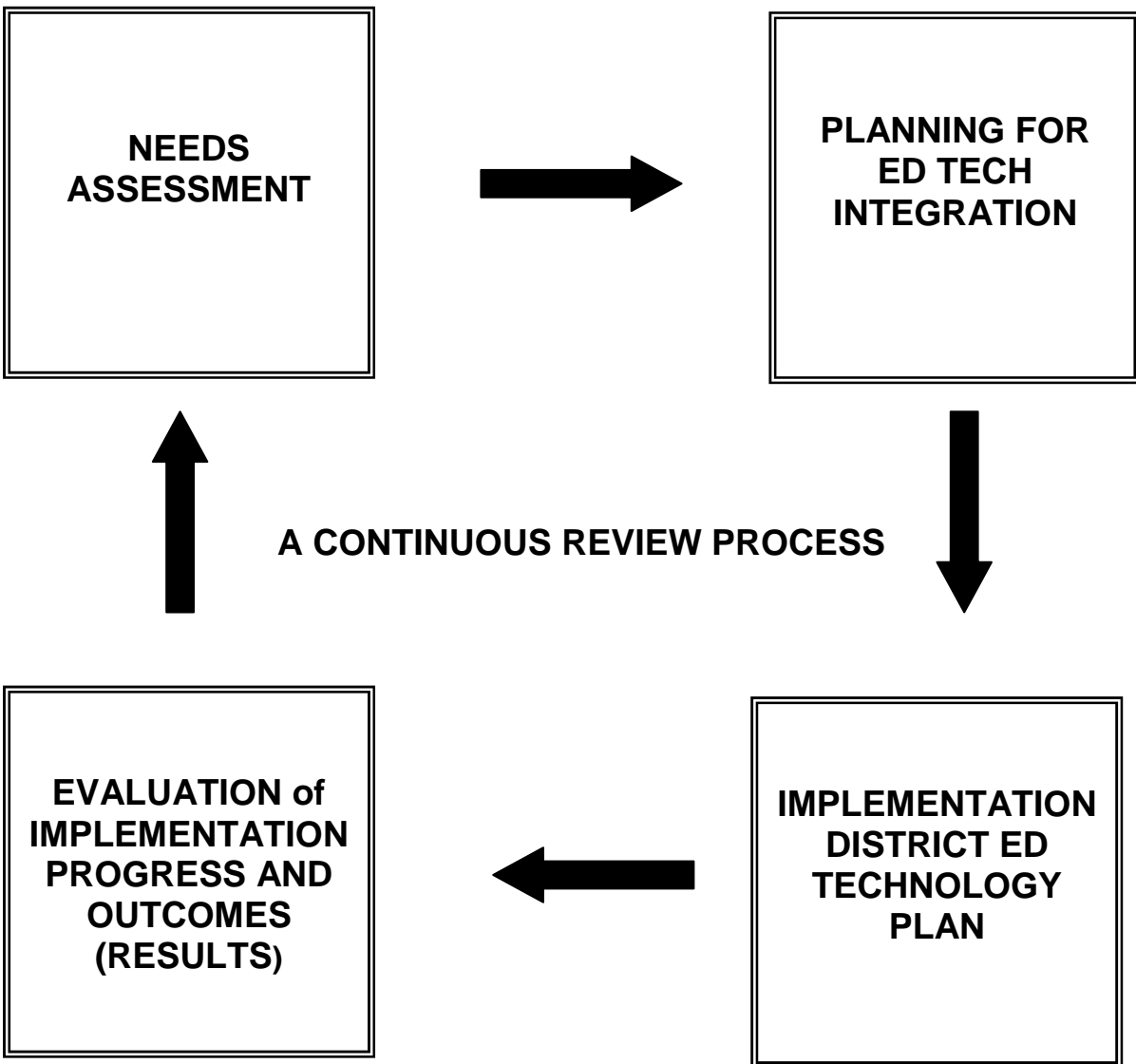http://www.state.nj.us/njded/abbotts/archives/guide/guide.htm

WHY?   A needs assessment provides a systematic way for each school district to identify, specifically and concretely, what must be accomplished in order to reach their vision. The school can then begin to plan what programs and activities should be continued or initiated to meet the needs identified by the needs assessment. Needs assessment, therefore, provides the basis for development of each district's technology plan and is key to its success.

WHEN?   Needs assessment is part of a continuous step-by-step process.   Based on all available relevant information (data), *needs assessment* provides the foundation for *implementation planning*, which facilitates *implementation*, which is itself followed by *evaluation* of implementation progress and effectiveness. Evaluation results provide important information to keep the needs assessment up to date, leading to necessary modifications of the implementation plan, changes in implementation, further evaluation, and so on.   Needs assessment is NOT a one-time exercise. Needs should be assessed frequently enough to ensure that the EDUCATIONAL TECHNOLOGY implementation plan can be modified to better meet ALL STAKEHOLDER needs as those needs are identified, and as the effectiveness of specific programs and activities is evaluated.

HOW? A quality needs assessment requires quality information. The school's needs assessment must be data-driven; "without data, yours is just another opinion."   Gather data that can help identify or shed light upon what is preventing students from achieving the CCCS and the barriers for integrating technology throughout the curriculum. Types of relevant data include, but are not limited to, results of statewide and standardized assessments, classroom assessments, student portfolios, attendance records, demographic information, evaluative reports of school or community programs, as well as results of surveys and focus groups. Areas of need to be assessed must include the areas indicated as elements needed for successful integration into the technology.

WHO? District leaders are required to conduct needs assessments within their district.   All stakeholders (parents, students, teachers, other school and district staff, and community members) should have the opportunity to provide input into identifying needs that are preventing students from achieving the CCCS, and the barriers for integrating technology into the curriculum (not only through one classroom's instructional process)

NEEDS ASSESSMENT

NEEDS ASSESSMENT	→	**PLANNING FOR ED TECH INTEGRATION**

A CONTINUOUS REVIEW PROCESS

EVALUATION of IMPLEMENTATION PROGRESS AND OUTCOMES (RESULTS)	←	**IMPLEMENTATION DISTRICT ED TECHNOLOGY PLAN**

Consider the following resources:

- *http://nces.ed.gov/pubs98/tech/2_4.asp*
- *http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2005/tech_suite/part_2.asp*
- Excerpt below taken from Tech Soup – the Technology Place for nonprofits
  http://www.techsoup.org/learningcenter/techplan/page4760.cfm

#3 - Define your needs:

Do you need technology? What will new technology help you do that you can't do already? Defining your needs will enable you to choose the most efficient solutions.

The trick to defining your needs is to describe what you want to do with technology, not what you think you need to buy. Consider the problems you might run into in your organization -- new policies to institute, procedures you need to follow to find new funding, and new staff members to work into your organization's structure. Then consider all the potential tools, including technology tools that you might use to solve these problems.

Learning to think this way is a little like learning a different language. Start by thinking more abstractly, then begin to discuss how technology might help you solve your problems and help your organization better fulfill its mission. What might your staff members be able to accomplish with a new intranet? What new capability will make a critical difference to productivity?

Put together a good representative team, one that represents all the major program and administrative areas of the organization -- including a decision maker who is involved in strategic planning -- and technical staff. Remember that a team full of people who have technical skills is not necessarily the best equipped to think of technology in terms of your organization's mission. It also helps if the technology team gathers input from staff about their needs. You can get staff input through a survey, or through individual interviews.

As you define your needs, do not start out by saying, "We need a Windows XP Professional network with 10 Pentium IIIs." Windows XP Professional may or may not be cost-effective or feasible. More importantly, if you don't know why you are getting it, there is no way to know if it will accomplish what you need it to. Instead, a nonprofit might say, "We need staff to be able to communicate effectively and efficiently, and conduct research on the issues that are important to our organization." Once you have identified your needs in this way, you can start thinking about how technology might help you reach your goals. You may conclude, for example, that your staff needs e-mail access, but consider which e-mail programs are appropriate, whether your staff needs centralized address lists, and how much of a concern privacy is. Then you can start evaluating specific technologies that are available.

The more you can connect your technology needs to your larger mission as an organization, the better your plan will be. Its recommendations will be more useful and meaningful, as well as more convincing to potential funders. The following are two examples of the kind of language you might use:

"We are a disability advocacy organization that does media campaigns and workplace training sessions to raise awareness of the needs of people with disabilities. We need to connect to the Internet in order to coordinate the planning of regional conferences and training sessions with our partners in other states who use e-mail. We also need to communicate by e-mail with corporations who are considering bringing us in to do training sessions."

"We are a social service agency that provides training and referral services to local Spanish-speaking citizens. Our referral staff needs to share information about clients with our job counseling staff."

As you define your needs, develop a sense of what your priorities are. What is mission-critical for the next month, and what can wait half a year? For instance, a nonprofit might decide that backing up all data takes first priority, while developing a Web site for funders can wait a few months.

TechSoup's Technology Organizational Assessment worksheet is a list of questions to start you thinking about your priorities and vision for technology use.

Also look to other organizations in your sector to learn about best practices in technology. While you don't want to follow other organizations blindly, keeping abreast of changes in your field is essential to being able to take advantage of technology in a timely manner.

RESOURCES:

Technology Planning –

- http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2005/tech_suite/index.asp#2
- www.genyes.com
- http://www.2learn.ca/currlinks/integratres.html
- http://www.nsba.org/site/doc_micro.asp?TrackID=&SID=1&DID=1387&CID=244&VID=38

Needs assessment tools -

- http://www.compstrategies.com/staffdevelopment/sdresources2.html#needs

RESEARCH: http://caret.iste.org/

Conducting the Needs Assessment

Needs assessments are based on the systematic collection of information, focused squarely on identifying barriers to student achievement.

1. *Determine the data needed.*
    - Review the information at hand. The following items are examples of barriers:
        a. Additional or reallocation of personnel
        b. Increase parental communication
        c. Increase access to technology for students
        d. Increase student academic achievement
        e. Increase student's technological literacy skills
    - What information is still needed to determine need in each area?
    - Is that information available?

2. *Determine the method of assessment.*
    - What method would most effectively produce the information needed?
    - What instrument(s) will be or have been used to collect the data? Are they adequate? That is, will they produce good, unbiased information?   (Consider language barriers, time required, and other factors that may affect the reliability, validity and usefulness of the information collected).
    - If sampling is planned, is the sample representative of the larger group?

3. *Conduct the assessment.*
    - Who will collect the data?
    - How should the participation of stakeholders be maximized? If conducting a survey, how can the response rate be maximized?
    - What is the timeframe for the assessment?

4. *Analyze the results.*
    - What patterns emerge from the data that help identify barriers to student achievement?
    - Does disaggregation (i.e., breaking down the data for different subgroups) reveal different results or patterns for these subgroups?
    - What are the strengths and weaknesses of the school in helping students achieve the CCCS?

5. *Summarize and report findings*

    - For each area, what needs have been identified?
    - How can the findings be communicated most effectively to the stakeholders?
    - Consider reporting the findings through charts and graphs with brief summaries.

Given the results of the needs assessment, the STAKEHOLDERS can begin to plan how to address the needs identified by exploring possible solutions, determining priorities, and developing goals, measurable objectives, and implementation and activity plans.